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Hood's Lost Opportunity
W.H. Newlin

William Henry Sherman

HOOD'S LOST OPPORTUNITY

Spring Hill Tennessee, November 29, 1864. Selections from Chapter VI, History of 73d Illinois Volunteer Infantry. Matter furnished by Frank Wilkeson, an Artilleryman in the Federal Army, for publication in the Grand Army Gazette and National Guardsmen, Nos. 82 and 84 Nassau Street, New York City. (Date, not later than 1889.)

Three years ago my comrade, Rhett Thomas, and I were prospecting in the foot hills of the Sierra Madre Mountains in Wyoming. Thomas was an ex-Confederate soldier, a Mississippian. He was tall, slender, lean-flanked, thin-faced, black-eyed and forty-two years old. On the evening of May 30th (1886) we sat by a blazing camp fire in Bear Creek Valley. The dark pine clad highlands behind us resounded with the noise of falling waters and the mournful sighing of swaying pines. We sat silently looking at the fire, here dying down, there suddenly glowing into heat, as if it were alive and swayed by a gust of passion. The fire and the day recalled memories of the war.

"Thomas," I said, "to-day is Decoration Day. Throughout the North the graves of the men who fell in defense of the Union have been strewn with flowers. The memories of the war are being recalled around thousands of hearth stones to-night. You never speak of the war. Break your rule to-night, and tell me a battle story."

Thomas looked at me inquiringly for an instant and then said sadly: "I do not like to talk of the war. My father and brothers were killed in battle, our home was burned, our slaves freed, our lands made valueless. My friends and comrades were shot dead by the score. Other scores, weakened by starvation and hard work and thinly clad, died. The memories of the war are exceedingly painful to me. But," he added as he shrugged his shoulders to my entreaty to talk, "pile some wood on the fire while I cut a couple of pipefuls of tobacco and then I will tell you of the fiercest battle I was in."

I piled logs high on the fire. We lit our pipes on the glowing coals, then, wrapped in our blankets, we sat on the ground and I listened attentively to my rebel friend.

"I belonged to Joe Johnston's army," said Thomas. "We had ceased to talk of our victory at Kenesaw. The daily fighting during our long retreat before Sherman had been almost forgotten. Our lost opportunity at Peach-Tree Creek—lost by the removal of Johnston—had ceased to trouble us. The loss of Atlanta and thousands of our comrades who fell in the battles around that town was still fresh in our memories. And fresher still was the recollection of the bloody assault on the two redoubts near Altoona that were held by a couple of thousand Yankees. We had lost Johnston, in whom we had unbounded confidence; Hood, whom we did not consider a safe soldier, was in command. We feared that some of the belief as to the fighting capacity of Northern men,

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held by the slave-holders before the war, still lingered in his mind. We privates had promptly discovered that the Yankees were as efficient fighters as we for two days, and our superiors if the battle lasted three, four or five days. We had a saying which was founded on fact; it was: 'Yankees must be whipped in two days, or they cannot be beaten at all.'

"We marched north, south, east, west—in any direction Hood saw fit to lead us—and Sherman trailed after us. At Gaylesville he tired of the pleasures of the chase and abandoned us. We camped for a few days, then crossed the Tennessee River a few miles above Florence, and then marched rapidly toward Columbia. Here we had our first hard fighting in forcing the passage of Duck River. We pushed the Federals from the river, and then made a furious march, fighting as we went so as to intercept the retreat of Schofield's army. We outmarched them, and slept near Spring Hill. When we bivouacked we knew we had Schofield in a trap and that he was ours."

Thomas ceased talking. He looked gloomily into the fire for an instant, and then said regretfully: "Yes, we outmarched Schofield, and then we slept, and while we slept Schofield marched by—marched within a half mile of our campfires. I have never seen more intense rage and profound disgust than was expressed by the weary, foot-sore, battle-torn Confederate soldiers when they discovered that their officers had allowed their prey to escape."

This is all we need to quote from Thomas' statement. Undeniably the cause of Hood's losing, or failing to improve his opportunity, is correctly and tersely expressed in the last two sentences quoted above. It shows how or why the opportunity was lost and places the blame where it belongs—upon their officers, Hood and his subordinates. The essence or truth of history regarding this episode is that while Hood's army slept, Schofield's marched. What was Hood's loss, was Schofield's gain. And thus is explained the intensity, severity and dogged determination exhibited next day in the unexampled fighting at Franklin, Hood trying to retrieve his loss and Schofield trying to save his gain, which he did; then marched off; burning no bridge, or leaving any hindrances in the way of Hood's **opportunity** to follow up.

But there seems to be a kind of secondary cause of Hood's "**Lost Opportunity**," at Spring Hill. A question arises: What was back of the cause, or rather what was primarily **the cause** of that "Lost Opportunity?" What caused their officers to allow the Confederate soldiers to sleep? Were they, or were they not celebrating the "opportunity," exulting in the fact that the opportunity was really theirs? Next, what excuse or explanation can be given for the remissness of duty on the part of their officers in "**allowing their prey to escape**"?

In a letter from a subscriber to the **Confederate Veteran**, viz.: J. S. Hatch, 36th Ill. Vols., Plano, Ill., I find this statement, viz.:

"My 'Confederate Veteran' just received. A man has quite an article "on Spring Hill. Says Capt. H. H. Showers, one of Forrest's Cavalry "and on Hood's escort, states a barrel of old apple brandy at the "Cheavis House was the cause of Schofield's escape. (I think it should "be Thompson's instead of Cheavis').

"Capt. Anderson, I think, of the 4th Tenn. Cav., C. S. A., is the man

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and the other six taken as flankers. Obstructions: The enemy, one half mile north of Spring Hill. Companies A, F, D and I were detached for advance guards. I was detached from Company A with several men and ordered to take and maintain a distance of from two to four hundred yards in advance. * * * * I feel good yet when I think how coolly those six companies of the 73d stood there in that open field east of town, and stubbornly fired into that advancing column as though it would ride them down."—Sergeant Bullard.

"Now note the situation. The 4th corps formed in a sort of semicircle on east side of the pike, with the little town of Spring Hill in the rear of about the center. The trains of the corps had been coming in, accompanied by thousands of refugees, both white and black. Some came in family carriages, others in wagons and carts and every conceivable kind of vehicle, while still others walked and carried all their earthly possessions. These were with our immense train of commissary and quartermaster stores, camp and garrison equipage and artillery. This conglomeration was all inside the semicircle described. What the result would have been had Hood at this time attacked us can only be surmised. That he did **not** was **one** of the **unfortunate** blunders of his life and **one** of the most **fortunate** things in the history of the 4th Corps.* As soon as the rear of the 23d Corps had passed, this immense conglomeration known as an army train commenced to move out toward Franklin, and as soon as the train had all moved out, the troops were cautiously withdrawn, beginning at the extreme right or south, of the line, and by daylight on the morning of the 30th all had moved out **except** the 1st Brigade of the 2d Division, designated as rear guard. * * * * When the 73d formed in line of battle north of Spring Hill, November 30th, facing south, it looked upon a town that was about as completely stripped as it was ever its fortune or misfortune to see. There was not a man, or mule, or a dollar's worth of property left behind."—Capt. and Brevet Major Patten.

It is clearly, unmistakably apparent from the foregoing accounts, **both** Confederate and Federal, that the **opportunity**, full sized and portentous, did loom magnificently for Hood, but waited **not** for jollification; then **did** as magnificently disappear and vanish for Schofield, who **did** industriously improve the time, allowing no grass to grow on the pike the night of November 29, 1864.

Both accounts fully admit and recognize the **opportunity**, its iniciency and its winking out for Hood, who laughed **first**. Schofield

*Note:—Here was the climax of Hood's "**Lost Opportunity.**" From this point it began to diminish, recede and finally disappear, and was **lost**, never to reappear. There were many good causes for exultation on the part of Hood and his officers prior to this finishing climax, the height or magnitude of which may have led to over-confidence and a resort to the barrel of apple brandy herein referred to.

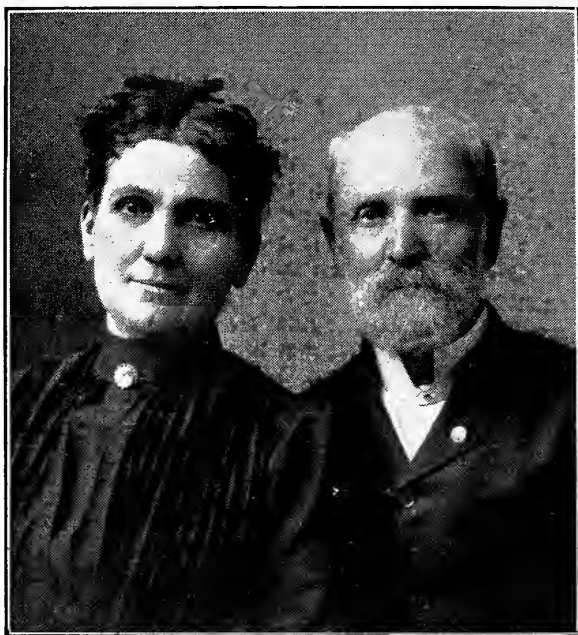
laughed last and well earned the privilege. As Lincoln said in one of his addresses—the second inaugural, “The Almighty has his own purposes.” Hood and Schofield supposedly fitted in, each in his place, in the accomplishment of those purposes. Whatever may have contributed in a daring non-combatant way to this result is not at this late day susceptible of proof.

Respectfully submitted.

W. H. NEWLIN

Historian 73d Ill. Infty.,

925 West Washington Street, Springfield, Ill.



COMRADE AND MRS. W. H. NEWLIN.

12 Amanda Ann Hawes was born January 17th, 1848. She was one of a family of thirteen children, being the second daughter. Was married January 16th, 1868, to W. H. Newlin, who was the second son in a family of thirteen children. She was called and known by the name “Topsy”, being a child of dark complexion, at about the time of the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”. She died Wednesday morning, October 20th, 1915, leaving surviving her husband; T. H. Newlin, J. C. Newlin and W. C. Newlin, sons; one daugh-

ter; Mrs. A. J. Barnes; one son—first child—died in infancy. Georgetown, Vermilion county, Ill., was the birth-place of all the above named, except that W. C. and Kate H. Newlin were born at Danville. She is also survived by four grandchildren—William H. and Mary T., children of W. C. Newlin; June R. and Benj. A., children of Mrs. A. J. Barnes.

The funeral services were held Friday morning, Oct. 22, at 10 o'clock, at the residence, 925 West Washington street, Springfield, Ill., conducted by Rev. M. G. Coleman of Taylorville and Rev. T. N. Ewing of Springfield. Comrades Birt, Davidson and Davis, and Professors Dickerson, Humer and Taylor were the pall bearers. Services were concluded at the grave in Oak Ridge Cemetery. A. S. W. Hawes, Olive Newlin and Mrs. L. M. Thompson of Danville, Mrs. J. F. Newlin of Chrisman, and P. T. Hawes and William Coonrad of Decatur were the relatives in attendance from outside the city.



*For Mrs. A. J. Barnes
The 11th of Oct.*



"Comrade E. H. Strait of 36th Ill. of Ottawa, Ill., and I met and visited with—he told us a young lady in the Thompson house where Gen. Hood had his headquarters Nov. 29, 1864, on the Davis Ford Road—that is just about two miles east of the Col. Cheavis house on the Columbia Pike—told us of the barrel of apple brandy and effects thereof, etc."

Readers may draw their own conclusions. The foregoing is meant as a suggestion merely, not as a final settlement of any question at issue. Will close this paper by quoting from Chapter VI, 73d Ill., showing the conditions at Spring Hill on the afternoon and night of Nov. 29th, 1864:

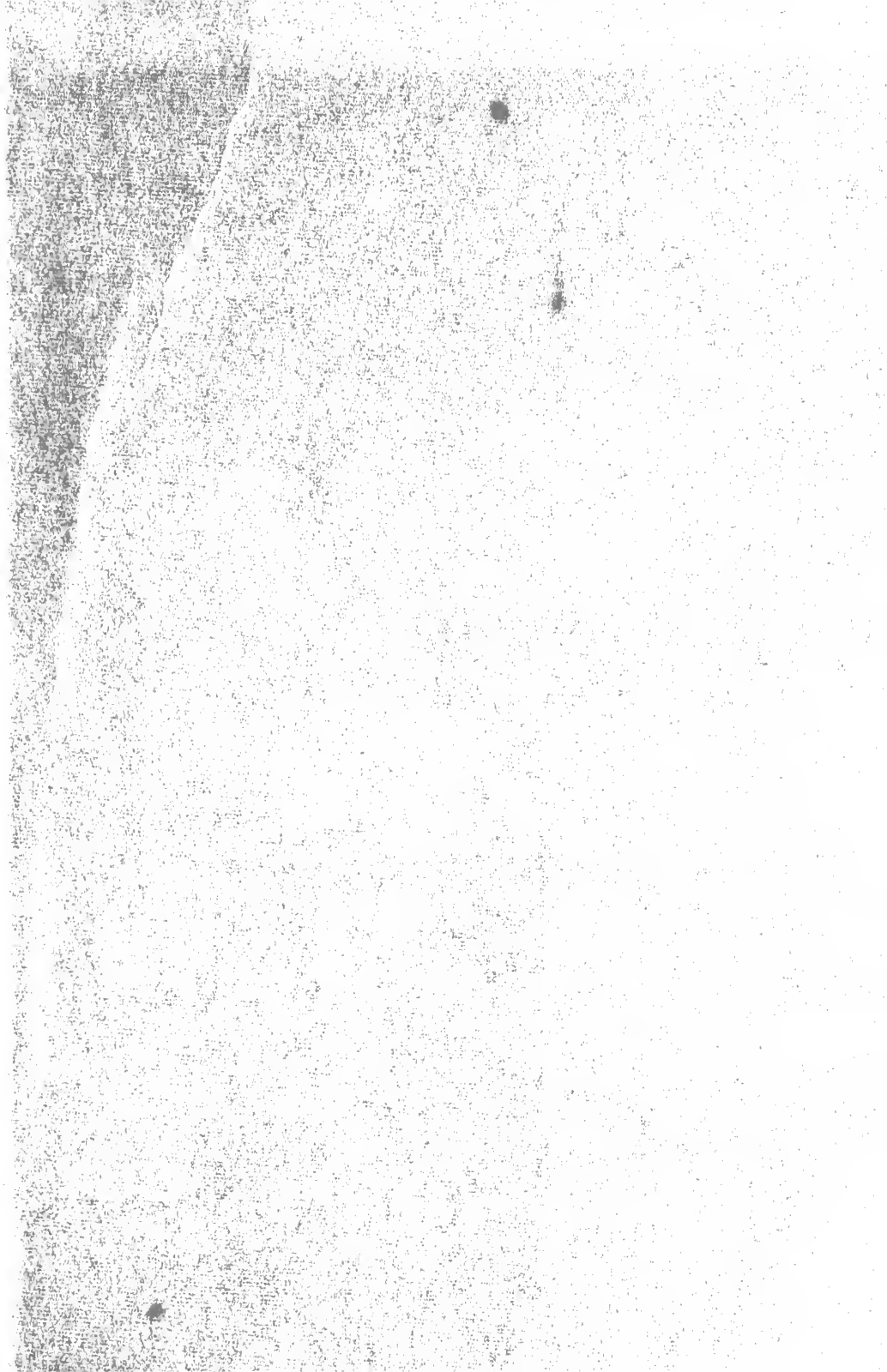
"The valley southeast is lighted up with rebel campfires; looks as though there might be a corps of Infantry there. Prospects look gloomy for all our train to be saved."—Capt. Kyger.

"We reached Spring Hill some time after noon. Saw Confederate cavalry in the road at or near Spring Hill. We did duty first as flankers then as skirmishers. Our position at Spring Hill was on the skirmish and picket line. We left Spring Hill early on the morning of November 30th. The 23d corps and all the 4th corps excepting our brigade passed along the pike, getting well on the way to Franklin before daylight. The 73d with the other regiments of our brigade, marched in line of battle as rear guard until we reached the hills south of Franklin, where a section of artillery was posted."—Sergt. Jack.

"Arrived at Columbia November 24th, I think. Remained there two or three days. Dug rifle pits north of river and we left there November 29th in the morning. From Columbia to Spring Hill our brigade had the advance. We reached there about the middle of the afternoon. I saw no obstructions in the road at Spring Hill. We were in line of battle northeast of Spring Hill. We advanced and drove the rebels back and were on picket all night. We started for Franklin after sunrise November 30th."—Lieut. Sherrick.

"We did picket duty and were detailed to burn a house between the picket lines, while near Columbia. The 73d Illinois crossed Duck River on the night of November 27th at nine o'clock and camped in a cornfield, where we lay all day of the 28th. On the morning of the 29th, we started for Spring Hill, the 73d Illinois in advance. * * * * Four companies, A, F, D, and I, were detailed, and Captain Patten of Company I was in command of the detail. The balance of the regiment was detailed as flankers when within two miles of town. When opposite town, on east side, we met and engaged Forrest's cavalry. I was detailed the night of the 29th to find the right of our picket line, and the left of the line of the 28th Kentucky, which I did, encountering considerable difficulty as well as danger."—Sergeant Hasty, Color Bearer.

"Left camp, and joined column on turnpike before sunrise on the morning of November 29th, 1864. Camp on north side Duck river is the camp I speak of. The regiment started at the head of column of 2d Division 4th Army Corps, four companies detached for advance guards



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